

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An optical element comprising:

a polarizing plate; and

a light diffusing plate laminated on said polarizing
5 plate, said light diffusing plate comprising a birefringent film
containing dispersed therein minute regions differing from the
birefringent film in birefringent characteristics,

wherein the minute regions comprises a thermoplastic
liquid-crystal polymer, and difference in refractive index
10 between the birefringent film and the minute regions in a direction
perpendicular to an axis direction in which a linearly polarized
light has a maximum transmittance, Δn^1 , is 0.03 or larger and that
in said axis direction, Δn^2 , is not larger than 80% of the Δn^1 ,
and

15 wherein the Δn^1 direction of said light diffusing plate
is parallel to a transmission axis of said polarizing plate.

2. An optical element according to claim 1, wherein
said thermoplastic liquid-crystal polymer is a thermoplastic
20 branched liquid-crystal polymer having side chains each
containing a segment represented by general formula (I): $-Y-Z-$,
wherein Y is one of a polymethylene chain, a polyoxymethylene chain
and a polyoxyethylene chain branching from a main chain and Z is
a para-substituted cyclic compound.

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3. An optical element according to claim 1, wherein said light diffusing plate contains the minute regions dispersedly formed by phase separation and each having a length in the Δn^1 direction of from 0.05 to 500 μm .

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4. An optical element according to claim 2, wherein said light diffusing plate contains the minute regions dispersedly formed by phase separation and each having a length in the Δn^1 direction of from 0.05 to 500 μm .

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5. An optical element according to claim 1, wherein said light diffusing plate comprises two or more birefringent films superposed on each other so that the Δn^1 directions of each of the birefringent film layer are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

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6. An optical element according to claim 2, wherein said light diffusing plate comprises two or more birefringent films superposed on each other so that the Δn^1 directions of each of the birefringent film layer are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

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7. An optical element according to claim 3, wherein said light diffusing plate comprises two or more birefringent films superposed on each other so that the Δn^1 directions of each

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of the birefringent film layer are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

8. An optical element according to claim 4, wherein
5 said light diffusing plate comprises two or more birefringent films superposed on each other so that the Δn^1 directions of each of the birefringent film layer are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

10 9. A liquid-crystal display comprising a liquid-crystal cell and the optical element according to any one of claims 1 to 8 disposed on one or each side of said liquid-crystal cell.

15 10. A liquid-crystal display according to claim 9, wherein said optical element is disposed on a viewing side of said liquid-crystal cell, with said light diffusing plate of said optical element facing said liquid-crystal cell.